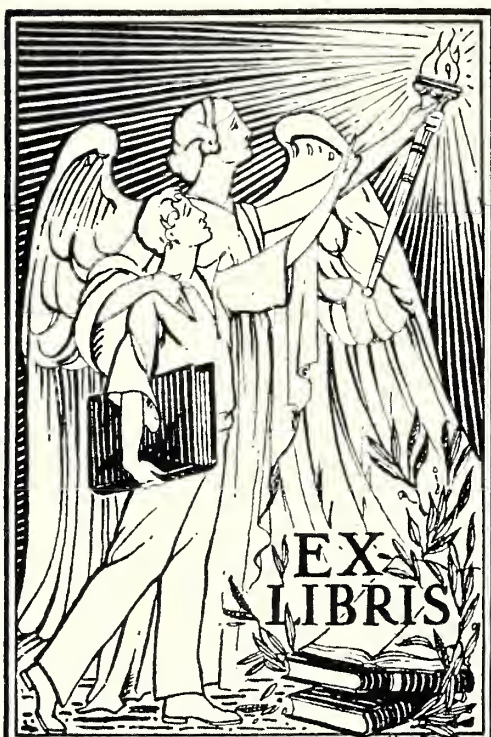


THE MASS OF THE
BLIND ARCHBISHOP
by
Addison Burbank

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The Mass of the Blind Archbishop

by ADDISON BURBANK

I WONDER at my temerity in calling on Archbishop Pittini on my first day in the Dominican Republic. For one thing, I am title-shy. I realize that an archbishop is still a priest. But whereas "Father" comes warmly and naturally, "Your Excellency" has the chill of protocol. It suggests formality, private secretaries, inaccessibility. And Archbishop Pittini is no ordinary archbishop. He is Metropolitan—nay more, Primate of America. No other prelate in our hemisphere has such a formidable array of titles. To meet him, I felt, would be as difficult as securing a private audience with the Pope. But I had come to Santo Domingo to learn what I could about Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, who began his work as the great Apostle of the Indians in this first Spanish colony of the New World, and no one could better help me off to a flying start than the Most Reverend Monseñor Ricardo Pittini, Metropolitan Archbishop and Primate of America.

I pictured him living in a sumptuous palace. It would, I supposed, be in the neighborhood of the Cathedral. This was easy enough to locate, since it faces Columbus Plaza in the very heart of America's oldest city. Arriving there, however, I found the doors of the beautiful Holy Basilica closed. I wandered around till I came to a small square in the rear where the taxis park. I had hardly turned the corner when a guide accosted me.

"You wish to see the Cathedral, Sir?"

"No, thank you. I am looking for the Archbishop's Palace."

Dropping his professional air, he replied courteously, "Right through there, Sir."

"Here?" I was a bit incredulous as I stared at the plain archway in the high wall.

"Si, Señor, through that patio."

HE led me into a small, bare courtyard. In the center stands a recently erected statue of the Curé d'Ars, the only parish priest ever canonized. It is a note of newness amid the time-darkened antiquity—almost the only innovation since the great church, begun in 1523 by the first Bishop of Santo Domingo, Alejandro Geraldini, was finally completed in 1541. A few meager plants were struggling for survival in the parched soil at the base of the statue.

The guide knocked on a weather-beaten door, then left as it was

proaching its end, the Gaullists even hold out the glittering price of Head of State to the ex-history teacher and newspaperman. Will Bidault be able to provide a working compromise for French-German understand-

ing, the only basis of a united free Europe? Or will personal ambition and the jockeying for position of party-politicians wreck European unity in sight of a safe harbor? The next few months will tell.

Argument from Design

by DEBORAH WEBSTER

WHO packed the tiny umbrella in its sheath?
Undifferentiated first,
An embryo speck;
A dot, a thread
You might dissect, and find no hint
Of ultimate variety. Yet here
Distinction gradually developed, setting apart
Surface from surface, still all folded tight,
New surface tight-pressed against new surface, each distinct.

Each infinitesimal sharp crease
Strengthened to a rib. Here lay at last, tight-sheathed,
The tiniest umbrella ever was,
The littlest live umbrella, soaking in
Through threadlike filaments the rain, the distillation
Held by good earth; and through its silver down
The warm sun; till the day—Who said the word?—
The little ribs should stiffen, and unpleat
Their delicate silver-fuzzed accordion-pleated
Pale-green-translucent parasol—
A strawberry leaf.

opened by a young diocesan priest in a yellowed cassock.

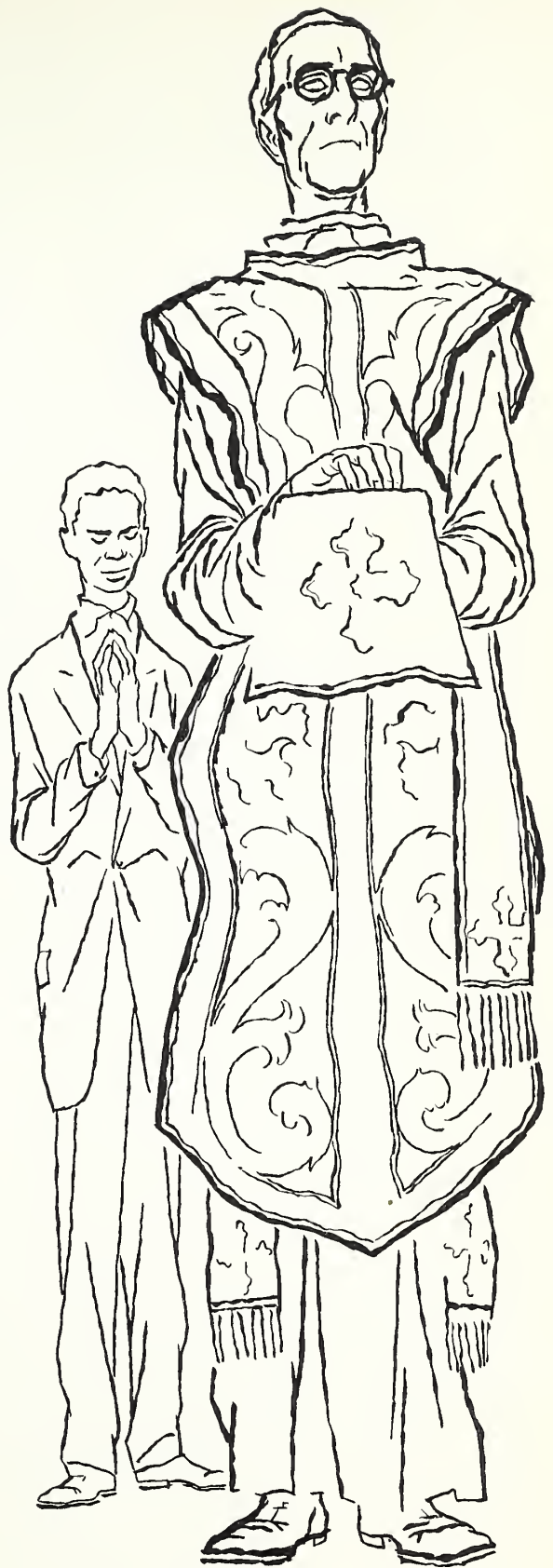
The big room I now entered was anything but sumptuous. There were no rugs, drapes, oil paintings — only two battered desks and a few chairs.

I asked to see Archbishop Pittini. To my surprise, I was taken without formality through an inner office where another priest sat at a correspondence - littered desk, and out to an unkempt yard where a Negress was scrubbing clothes in a tin washtub set on a wobbly wooden bench.

WE mounted a cement staircase to a second-story balcony. A faded red door opened into the sala. Light entered from the sky through arches in the west wall. A large painting of Our Lady of Highest Grace, patroness of the Republic, occupied the center of the opposite wall. The furniture consisted of a table, bench, and several uncomfortable chairs of the Victorian era. The floor was uncarpeted. A tall carved wooden screen shut off the far end of the room. From behind the screen came a gentle voice carrying on a monologue in Spanish.

"His Excellency is on the phone. Please wait here for a moment," said the young priest. He then went on to the Archbishop's "private" office.

I took a seat and looked about me. I suppose Alice



would have called my experience so far an adventure in un-Wonderland. Where was the episcopal pomp and display? Surely, the occupant of these quarters cared not a fig for either.

A story came to mind of an earlier and less humble prelate who complained to the King that, since the viceroy had two palaces, the archbishop should be entitled to at least one. Evidently His Majesty passed off the quip, for the Cathedral Archbishops have always lived in this cramped and unimpressive residence.

Later, I learned that Monseñor Pittini refuses to spend a cent on nonessentials. At heart still a simple Salesian priest and follower of Don Bosco, he is devoted to the education of youth. He is often quoted as saying, "We are not building buildings but boys and girls."

At length the monologue ended. The young priest leaned forward and spoke in a low voice. Then he straightened and beckoned to me.

I now met the owner of the gentle voice. He was sitting in a swivel chair at an old roll-top desk in a space no bigger than a telephone booth. A thin wisp of a man, his face is beautifully modeled, the forehead high and full, the nose aquiline, the mouth broad, resolute and kindly. An infinitude of love, humility, and patiently borne suffering marks his expression.

He turned toward me with a wavering, sensitive smile, and held out his hand. I do not think I intended to kiss his ring, as I had never met an archbishop nor performed this act of homage. But I sensed a saintliness in him that impelled me to kneel and touch my lips to the amethyst on his finger. I did not know then that the ring

and the beautiful pectoral cross he wears were the gift of the late Patrick Cardinal Hayes of New York.

With the same beatific smile, he motioned toward vacancy and asked me to be seated. Only then did I realize that the sunken eyes behind the dark glasses were stone blind!

THE young priest brought a chair* and then left us alone. While we talked, I kept staring at his desk—at its stark, dusty, worm-eaten emptiness. In one of the pigeon holes was a sheaf of personal notepaper. Otherwise, the desk was bare, except for a broken bust of Christ which appeared to be a relic from some ruin, and the dial telephone. The numbers were erased by constant dialing, as the phone is the Archbishop's main contact with his vast diocese and the world. He employs no secretary, and often dictates his correspondence to a chance visitor. Every letter, however, bears his own remarkable signature.

When I told him that my wife, Covelle, and I were writing about Padre Las Casas, he showed a lively interest and assured me that every facility of the Church would be freely at my disposal. Before leaving, I asked his blessing. In giving it, he said:

"You and your wife have my

Addison Burbank, artist and writer, and convert to the Faith, recently spent some time in the Dominican Republic. It was a new and invigorating experience, he says, to live in an atmosphere of Catholicism, and in his forthcoming book, *Journey Into Faith*, from which this article is taken, he shares that experience with his readers. Mr. Burbank and his wife, Covelle Newcomb, also a writer, have collaborated in several volumes.

blessing on your work. I want you to let the Catholic world know about the greatest of the early colonial missionaries and the savior of the Indians."

Feeling extraordinarily privileged and confident that his blessing would bear fruit for Covelle as well as for me, I left happy at heart for having had the courage to overcome my false fears of his exalted rank. I had indeed made a true friend.

AFTER losing his sight seven years ago, Monseñor Pittini dictated his life story, *Memorias Salesianas de un Arzobispo Ciego*. In the foreword, he makes this revealing statement: "I give thanks to God for having prolonged the years of my life, giving it a *touch of romance* by the variety and contrasts of its vicissitudes . . ." (Emphasis mine).

Ordained in Italy January 22, 1899, the first decade of his priesthood was spent in South America. He was, however, to gain a wide experience of the world, including the United States. But he who is today a marvelous linguist found, on coming here, that "it is not easy for fifty-two-year-old vocal organs to masticate English."

In July, 1933, his superior gave him these instructions: "The Nuncio and the President of the Republic of Santo Domingo (Antilles), desire to found a Salesian School of Agriculture or a School of Arts and Crafts. Go, observe, and inform us."

Making his first air flight, he left Miami by hydroplane and landed in the Bay of San Pedro de Macoris. After visiting the Papal Nuncio in the capital, he went to Santiago, where President Rafael L. Trujillo awaited him. They discussed

plans for a school in the capital. Then the President said: "Go and choose the land that pleases you most. As for money, will it require a great deal?"

"I cannot fix the sum, Mr. President," answered Father Pittini. "Put one hand on your heart and the other in your purse and listen to what both tell you."

President Trujillo smiled broadly. Within five minutes the contract was signed!

IT is not surprising that in February of the following year Father Pittini was sent back to the Republic. He came all alone, uprooted from the Community in which he had lived forty of his fifty-eight years.

Before long he began to hear rumors, which at first seemed incredible to him, that he was to receive the miter. Four years previously, Archbishop Adolfo A. Nouel had suffered a nervous breakdown, so that the Primacy was in effect vacant.

In October, 1935, Father Pittini was called to Port au Prince, Haiti, by Papal Nuncio José Fietta. On his arrival, the Nuncio and the Archbishop of Haiti, Monseñor José Loguaze, whisked him off to Kenscoff, a mountain resort some five thousand feet above the heat of the port.

"We passed three days there," says Monseñor Pittini, "and they were so generous and kind that I can only compare their treatment of me to that accorded a condemned criminal in the United States in the three days preceding his execution. The only difference was that they were preparing me for the Archiepiscopal Chair of the Primate Cathedral of America."

Father Pittini went to New York to raise money among his friends and co-workers in order to defray the initial costs of his changed rank. Among these friends was Patrick Cardinal Hayes.

"On arriving at his office he congratulated me, and then taking me by the hand, led me to my great surprise, to his sleeping quarters.

"My dear Monseñor," he said to me, 'as Archbishop you will need a ring. Take mine.' And he put it on my finger. 'You will need a cross. Take mine.' And he hung it on my neck.

"Your Eminence," I said, overcome by emotion, 'why are you so good and generous to me?'

"He put his index finger on his lips to enjoin silence. Once again leading me, he went to his writing desk and handing me a check for five hundred dollars, said: 'I know that you, as a Salesian, are poor, and I know that Don Bosco is watching me from Heaven.'

"I was never to see him again. He died of a heart attack, perhaps because his heart was too great."

ON December 8, 1935, Monseñor Loguaze consecrated Archbishop Pittini in the Primate Cathedral in Santo Domingo.

Monseñor Pittini says he was "born with the defect of myopia, as with that of original sin." He blames himself for not taking as much care of his eyes as of his soul.

"I committed the common error of abusing my eyes. Besides using them in the fulfillment of my duties, I abused them because of an insane anxiety to know, rightly held blameworthy in the first pages of the *Imitation of Christ*.

"Because of this anxiety, I read constantly when traveling by train;

during the years of my archiepiscopacy, I read late into the night, at times with insufficient light, until I was fatigued and my eyes protested. . . . Finally, pastoral visits over bad roads and the consequent jolting ended by provoking certain shadows in my right eye, precursors of the detachment of the retina. Thus began a Calvary of operations on my eyes; two on the right eye, and five on the left."

BUT in spite of all the operations and the agony, the shadows became black, impenetrable darkness. No more would he see the beauty of lines, forms and colors, or enjoy the spectacles of nature and of art. The loss of these pleasures saddened him to the depths of his soul, but blindness robbed him of something even more precious:

"In a particular sense I lamented not being able to see in the eyes of a friend the reflection of friendship; in the eyes of a child the reflection of innocence, and in the scintillation of the stars a reflection of God."

The most poignant loss a priest can suffer, however, is to be deprived of saying Mass. But the failure of one vital organ is usually compensated for by the energizing of another. The need for greater reflection and concentration has given Monseñor Pittini a prodigious memory. When he realized that he would no longer be able to read the missal he committed the entire formula of the Mass to memory, and so is able to do the seemingly impossible—celebrate daily Mass!

THE morning after my interview with Archbishop Pittini I went to the Cathedral, arriving there a little before seven. At first the huge

Basilica seemed deserted. The holy water fonts were dry. Not a person could be seen in the dim interior with its forest of tall columns like royal palms branching upward to form the beautiful ribbed vault. I was on the point of leaving when I descried the faint glow of candle light beyond the panel of the presbytery. Following that pale beacon, I came upon the strangest sight I have ever witnessed.

At the foot of the altar of Our Lady of Antigua a tall Negro in a gray suit was vesting the frail Archbishop. He performed his task with the care and gentleness of an affectionate friend.

I slipped quietly into a seat among the few men and women who had come to the Mass of the blind Archbishop.

When Monseñor Pittini was fully vested, the Negro, whom I later came to know as the Cathedral sacristan, led him up to the altar; like a child the Archbishop confided himself to his guidance.

There was no tabernacle, the chalice and ciborium being kept under a white veil. Beneath the crucifix rests a framed picture of Our Lady of Highest Grace. Reaching almost to the lofty ceiling, the Renaissance retable forms a rich setting for the ancient painting of Our Lady of Antigua, a gift to the Cathedral of their Catholic Majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella, whose portraits appear on either side of the pedestal upon which the Virgin stands.

THE sacristan hovered near the blind celebrant as he said the opening prayers of the Mass. But as yet no altar boy had appeared. When he came to the "*Introibo ad altare Dei*," a woman's voice made the

Latin response. Kneeling outside the sanctuary at a *prie-dieu* was an elderly Negress. She was plainly dressed and a handkerchief had been hastily thrown over her ashen hair. From her familiarity with the liturgy it would appear she was accustomed to the emergency.

Now the Archbishop felt his way along the altar to the Epistle side, his gray shadow following close beside him. Altar card and open missal were in place, even for those unseeing eyes. As I read the Epistle for the day (Ecclus. xxxi. 8-11), it seemed to refer to the celebrant himself:

"Blessed is the rich man that is found without blemish, and that hath not gone after gold, nor put his trust in money nor in treasures. Who is he, and we will praise him? For he hath done wonderful things in his life. Who hath been tried thereby, and made perfect, he shall have glory everlasting."

JUST then the altar boy arrived, still wriggling shamelessly into his surplice. The sacristan silently withdrew and the woman who had been making the responses took her place in the front pew.

It had not occurred to me what would happen at Communion. I saw the server place the *prie-dieu* in front of the altar steps. The gray-haired Negress got to her feet. But when I too rose I thought the altar boy looked startled. I hesitated, not knowing what to do. But the woman decided for me. Kneeling upon the altar step, she motioned me to the *prie-dieu*.

MEANWHILE Archbishop Pittini stood patiently, his brow knit in concentration, as if he sensed something unusual was taking place.

The altar boy whispered in his ear, and he nodded comprehendingly. In his hand he held a gold ciborium no larger than an egg cup. It apparently held a single Host, for he took It out and broke It in two. I shall never know how he found

my tongue. I scarcely felt the touch of his fingers. And so I received the Body of our Lord from the hand of the blind Archbishop, whose invocation I am sure no angel could resist carrying straight up to God's altar.

Of Goliath

by ETHEL BARNETT DE VITO

*GOLIATH of Gath was a man of wrath
Was a giant who trod a giant's path,
And men said, "There hieth
The great Goliath"
And when he went forth with his giant laugh
Uprooting a willow for his staff
The men were affrighted, the women beguiled
And Goliath saw, and Goliath smiled.*

*Oh, the world was his, with more worlds to gain
As he roared and warred on a sunburned plain
And men said, "There flieth
The great Goliath"
And fought beside him on scorching sands
And put their trust in his giant hands
But a boy named David crossed his path
And that was the end of Goliath of Gath!*

*The world went on, as worlds know how to
And men found a better man to bow to,
For they asked, "How dieth
The great Goliath?"
He died of a pebble, not a boulder,
Of a lad who did not reach his shoulder.
So the great Goliath, like many later,
Was only great till he met one greater.*

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